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SUBJECT: JUNBESH-WAHDAT ALLIANCE CLOSE TO RELUCTANT KARZAI
ENDORSEMENT

REF: KABUL 991

¶1. (SBU) Representatives of the majority-Uzbek Junbesh-e-Milli party and Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Mardum faction of Hazara leader Haji Mohammed Mohaqeq say their two-party alliance is reluctantly nearing an endorsement of President Karzai's re-election campaign. The two parties agreed last month to support a joint candidate from outside of their own parties (reftel). Lower House MP and Junbesh deputy Faizullah Zaki told PolOff the two parties would probably announce their support for Karzai within the next week. In the meantime, the alliance will continue talks with United Front nominee Abdullah Abdullah and former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani in the unlikely event that negotiations with the Karzai camp break down.

¶2. (SBU) Junbesh and Wahdat contacts are not excited about the Karzai endorsement, but say they cannot afford another five years in opposition, locked out of political power. The two parties tried earlier this year to convince Karzai to sign an agreement promising each party five seats in the Cabinet. Karzai declined to commit himself to a public promise, knowing that neither party was eager to join Abdullah's struggling campaign. Zaki feels the alliance's "true home" would be alongside Abdullah, but does not think the UF nominee will win more than 15 percent in the first round. Even with a strong Junbesh-Wahdat endorsement, it would be difficult for Abdullah to top 35 percent. If Ghani draws less than 10 percent of Karzai's Pashtun support away, Zaki calculates a first-round Karzai victory is increasingly likely.

¶3. (SBU) Mohaqeq and Junbesh Lower House MP Shaker Kargar have met numerous times in recent weeks to agree to "red lines" that the alliance will hold to in case Karzai undervalues their endorsement. Kargar admits the red lines have slipped as Karzai's re-election chances grew stronger. Neither Junbesh nor Wahdat is now insisting on Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, or Finance to be one of "their" ministries. Junbesh Chairman Sayed Noorullah has asked his deputies leading the negotiations with Karzai to instead insist on a "new direction" in the government's anti-corruption policies, even if it means walking back from their demand for five Cabinet seats.

¶4. (SBU) Given both parties' fierce criticism of the government's performance in recent years, a Junbesh-Wahdat endorsement of Karzai would be another sign that Afghan political elite believe Karzai's re-election to be a safe bet. Political observers also tell us that the fear Karzai will retaliate after the election against groups who did not support him is also pushing more uncommitted groups into his camp. Reformers like Zaki are disheartened at the thought of joining what they view as a failing administration, but view their probable support for Karzai as a lifeline to their parties' political livelihoods. "Our country cannot afford another five years of Karzai if he governs like he is now, but at the same time, we (Junbesh) can't afford another five

years of being out of power," he said.
EIKENBERRY